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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study investigated the ability of student teachers to translate and apply textbook knowledge in the daily reading instruction of public elementary school students. Subjects, 24 teachers, were surveyed regarding their student teachers' use of 36 reading and management strategies covered in college courses. The participating teachers also identified the time period during which the student teachers implemented a specific activity. Results indicated favorable responses for individual behaviors and class management but also showed that only three of the behavior and management strategies ranked in the top half of the rated activities. Findings suggest that reading students had been exposed to a variety of methods and materials, but that these experiences appeared not to transcend the classroom. (Two tables of data and the survey instrument are included.) (RS)

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# THE EXPANSION OF FIELD EXPERIENCES IN THE READING PROGRAM

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## THE EXPANSION OF FIELD EXPERIENCES IN THE READING PROGRAM

The need to convert pre-student teaching content into a practicum with "real" school children is not new to teacher education programs. During the past two decades research has been aimed toward determining the effectiveness of field experiences and the strategies employed by the practicum student. The axiom "Students learn to teach by doing" does not identify the optimum number of field experiences hours that provide the needed practice, or whether the field experiences are really necessary, nor does it provide prospective students with the skills to be used during their field practice.

Current trends in education require more field experience to be included in all teaching areas. Some states require more than 200 hours of field work prior to student teaching (Paese, 88). The extensive number of hours meets the desires of the many teacher education students and graduates who have reported satisfaction with field work and have requested greater time be spent in active involvement with young students (Adkins, 80; Nealy, 81).

Kelly (70) and Calfee (83) concluded that students with more field experiences were not any better in their teaching performance than those with few experiences. Henry (83) found that students with fewer hours reported the same problems, viewed professional preparation the same way, and were rated just as highly by their cooperating teachers as students with more field experiences (Henry, 83).

The purpose of this article is to present the findings of a survey that investigated the ability of student teachers to translate and apply textbook knowledge in the daily reading instruction of public elementary school students. An ancillary factor considered was the readiness of students teachers, with extensive field experiences, to assume responsibility for classroom teaching.

## BACKGROUND: THE PROGRAM

The elementary reading curriculum at St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas, is a well-developed eighteen hour program. Field experiences have been an integral segment of the curriculum. Reading: Methods of Teaching Reading and Reading: Diagnosis, Remediation, and Prevention of Reading Difficultues are two reading courses taken by all elementary students. These classes include both observation and tutoring sessions for a total of 29 hours. A third course, Reading: Teaching in the Content Area, was developed to include five hours of tutoring of individual students as part of a cooperative program between a local school and the University.

To improve the program, Psycholinguistic Foundations of Reading was restructured during the 1987-1988 school year to include greater emphasis on language development, the functions of language, and Goodman's and Smith's philosophies of reading. In this course students complete nine hours working with two or three first grade students. Instruction is based upon deficiencies

identified by the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts. The college students are required to develop individual lessons utilizing VAKT techniques. Each forty-five minute period includes development of a short story. These published stories are presented to the class teacher and a second copy is given to the school library.

The fifty hour Practicum course was developed by the unification of two courses: Reading Skills Development and Reading Practicum. There was a need in the program to provide students with an opportunity to be in school settings for a longer period of time to enable them to face the reality of daily teaching before student teaching.

Each Practicum student is assigned to a public school teacher who volunteers to act as a model and mentor. This person is chosen for professionalism, expertise, and desire to share program goals.

Assignments, guidelines, general instructions, and expectations are discussed at an introductory meeting between the students and the professor, followed by a conference held in each assigned school with student and cooperating teachers. Schedules for observing, assisting, and teaching; routines; and expectations are established at this conference.

The college supervisor is responsible for visiting each student at least once a week to review work and to assure that a positive learning experience is taking place. This professor also acts as a facilitator at the weekly seminar sessions held at the college. At these weekly sessions work is reviewed, new topics discussed, and further program implementations planned.

Students are expected to complete the following tasks: (1) Administer Informal Reading Inventories (IRI), (2) Instruct daily reading instructional program, (3) Expand and teach Language Experience activities, (4) Develop long range and daily reading plans, (5) Implement three different approaches to teaching reading, (6) Gather data on one student and develop a case study, (7) Teach five different writing strategies, (8) Develop a student creative poetry book, (9) Construct and use five reading skill centers and five functional reading centers, (10) Research three assigned topics, and (11) a daily diary.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

This descriptive study was designed to investigate the effects of over 100 hours of field work upon the teaching styles of the student teachers. Over a two year period, 1987 - 1989, four groups of student teachers were selected. The survey instrument was distributed to the cooperating elementary teachers. Eighty percent were returned from a total of twenty-four individual teachers. The Survey behavior characteristics included eighteen reading and eighteen management strategies that had been covered in college courses. A second section of the instrument requested the cooperating teacher to identify the time period during which the student implemented a specified activity.

The returned surveys were divided into two groups: (1) students who

had selected reading as their area of concentration, and (2) all other education students. The results of the survey were tabulated and mean scores evaluated. The following table presents these results as computed, ranked in descending order based on mean scores of the total group (Col.1), mean scores of the reading (R) group (Col.2), rank order of the reading (R) group (Col.3), mean scores of the non-reading (NR) group (Col.4), and rank order of non-reading (NR) group.

The second phase, Involvement of Student Teachers in Assigned Classooms, illustrates the area covered, and the number of R and NR students that completed the activity during the identified time period.

Survey-A Comparison of Skills Used in Student Teaching

1. Never
2. At least once
3. Sometimes
4. Most of the time
5. Always

Arranged in decending order of the mean scores of the entire group.

| | Gp. Mean | Gp. Mean Rd. | Gp. Order RD. | Gp. Mean N.R. | Gp. Order N.R. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Demonstrated the ability to learn from experience. | 4.08 | 5.0 | 1 | 4.7 | 1 |
| 2. Demonstrated readiness for instruction at all times. | 4.7 | 4.8 | 3 | 4.6 | 2 |
| 3. Motivated students to achieve. | 4.7 | 4.9 | 2 | 4.5 | 4 |
| 4. Demonstrated growth in classroom management. | 4.6 | 4.8 | 4 | 4.5 | 5 |
| 5. Prepared all materials before students' arrival. | 4.6 | 4.7 | 10 | 4.6 | 3 |
| 6. Planned daily lessons focused on objectives. | 4.6 | 4.7 | 11 | 4.5 | 6 |
| 7. Demonstraced decision making abilities. | 4.6 | 4.8 | 5 | 4.4 | 8 |
| 8. Involved students in the learning process. | 4.5 | 4.8 | 6 | 4.3 | 10 |
| 9. Demonstrated ability to independently be a classroom teacher. | 4.5 | 4.8 | 7 | 4.3 | 11 |
| 10. Demonstrated a disciplined yet flexible attitude toward job performance. | 4.5 | 4.5 | 14 | 4.5 | 7 |
| 11. Demonstrated self-confidence. | 4.4 | 4.6 | 13 | 4.3 | 13 |
| 12. Set definite goals for lessons and informed students of these goals. | 4.4 | 4.5 | 15 | 4.4 | 9 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. Provided instruction to meet the needs of the group and/ or individual students. | 4.4 | 4.5 | 16 | 4.3 | 12 |
| 14. Demonstrates a knowledge of subject materials. | 4.4 | 4.5 | 17 | 4.3 | 14 |
| 15. Based daily reading instruction upon basal materials. | 4.4 | 4.8 | 8 | 4.1 | 18 |
| 16. Kept students on task. | 4.4 | 4.8 | 9 | 4.0 | 20 |
| 17. Used a variety of reading material. | 4.3 | 4.5 | 18 | 4.2 | 16 |
| 18. Attended to teaching reading skills while instructing content area subjects. | 4.3 | 4.7 | 12 | 3.9 | 22 |
| 19. Used alternative instructional methods to teach reading. | 4.3 | 4.3 | 20 | 4.3 | 15 |
| 20. Demonstrated skill in time management. | 4.3 | 4.3 | 21 | 4.2 | 17 |
| 21. Remediated and extended reading skills through the use of dittos. | 4.2 | 4.4 | 19 | 4.1 | 19 |
| 22. Incorporated extension activities in daily lessons. | 4.1 | 4.3 | 24 | 3.9 | 23 |
| 23. Incorporated appropriate remediation activities in daily lessons. | 4.1 | 4.2 | 25 | 4.0 | 21 |
| 24. Demonstrated use of higher level questions. | 3.8 | 4.2 | 26 | 3.5 | 25 |
| 25. Demonstrated awareness of several methods of teaching reading. | 3.8 | 4.3 | 22 | 3.4 | 26 |
| 26. Emphasized the phonetic approach in reading. | 3.7 | 4.1 | 27 | 3.3 | 27 |
| 27. Conducted an individualized reading program. | 3.4 | 4.0 | 28 | 2.8 | 29 |
| 28. Daily read aloud from trade books. | 3.3 | 4.3 | 23 | 2.4 | 33 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 29. Instructed students in SQRRR. | 3.3 | 3.0 | 35 | 3.7 | 24 |
| 30. Use centers to reinforce skills in reading. | 3.3 | 3.5 | 32 | 3.2 | 28 |
| 31. Use two or more levels of reading material in class. | 3.2 | 3.6 | 31 | 2.8 | 30 |
| 32. Instructed three or more reading groups each day. | 3.0 | 4.0 | 29 | 2.1 | 35 |
| 33. Developed Language Experience stories with extended activities. | 3.0 | 3.4 | 33 | 2.6 | 31 |
| 34. Evaluated students using I.R.I.'s and/or testing instruments correlated with text. | 3.0 | 3.7 | 30 | 2.3 | 34 |
| 35. Use the cloze technique to test comprehension and/or develop vocabulary. | 2.8 | 3.1 | 34 | 2.6 | 32 |
| 36. Used SSR. | 2.1 | 2.3 | 36 | 2.0 | 36 |

## INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENT TEACHERS IN ASSIGNED CLASSES

1. Not at all
2. First week
3. Second week
4. Third week
5. Fourth week or longer

| The student teacher: | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | R | NR | R | NR | R | NR | R | NR | R | NR |
| 1. Planned and taught one subject. | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 7 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| 2. Planned and taught two subjects. | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 3. Planned and taught one reading group. | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| 4. Planned and taught two reading groups. | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Planned and taught all reading groups. | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. Planned and taught all morning. | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 6 |
| 7. Planned and taught all afternoon. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 8 |
| 8. Planned and taught all day. | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 11 | 9 |
| Total | 10 | 7 | 8 | 0 | 27 | 9 | 23 | 18 | 44 | 45 |

Results of the survey reveal the current strength of the program is the development of behavior and management strategies. The students may have been influenced by the prescribed, less diagnostic programs used in many schools. Of the thirty-six rated items, the top fifty percent included only three directed toward reading activities. These were:

1. Based daily reading instruction on basal materials.
2. Used a variety of reading materials.
3. Attended to teaching reading skills while instructing content area subjects.

The use of basal materials was ranked eighth for reading concentration students and eighteenth by students whose areas of concentration were not reading. Reading students have been exposed to a variety of methods and materials, yet these experiences appear not to transcend the classroom. This might have been caused by the students' attempting to meet treacher, school, and district requirements. The NR students rated lower in the instruction of reading in the content areas. This might be attributed to the lack of a content course.

Favorable responses were received for items pertaining to individual behaviors and class management. Less favored were reading items including SSR, Cloze, IRI's, Language Experience, and Grouping. These areas are explained, developed, and taught in the college courses.

This survey of student teacher involvement illustrates the differences observed in class interactions between groups with reading as their area of concentration (R) and groups with other areas as their specialized fields (NR). Analysis of this information demonstrates that the practicum experience provides opportunities that enable many student teachers to assume the independent teaching role during their first or second week, thus permitting the students to cover a greater range of assignments during their ten week period.

The results of this study imply that teacher education must attempt (1) to collaborate even more closely with public school personnel to provide an introduction or review of a variety of reading strategies that encourage children to become more active participants in their learning, (2) to encourage the student and the classroom teacher to work in a more collaborative manner, each learning from the other, (3) to provide student teachers more reflective periods for review of their teaching of reading, and (4) to encourage the inclusion of appropriate reading tasks within subject areas.

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